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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004667

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PM COMMITS TO UNVEILING AGGRESSIVE STRATEGY ON
BAGHDAD SECURITY, MOVING FORWARD ON DE-BAATH, FORGING
MODERATE FRONT

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki December 20 told the Ambassador he sought decisive action with the development of a new plan for security in Baghdad and agreed to announce the new plan at a speech in coming days. He also agreed with the importance of following through with his commitment at the recent Political Party Reconciliation Conference for the reintegration of some members of the former military into the current armed forces or the payment of pensions to those who could not be reintegrated. The PM expressed concern about preconditions the IIP had made for participating in the proposed moderate political front, but emphasized the importance of moving forward with the front as a means for allowing the government to go after the Jaysh al-Mahdi and extreme Sunni elements. He said the Ambassador should follow up on Sunni extremist cleric Harith al-Dhari's interest in a meeting if the Ambassador believes it would produce results. The Ambassador and the PM also discussed UAE interest in managing and potentially building a port at Um Qasr. End Summary.

MALIKI SEEKS DECISIVE ACTION ON BAGHDAD SECURITY

12. (S) The Ambassador informed PM Maliki that the U.S. review of Iraq policy continued, but that President Bush planned to complete the project probably in early January. The Ambassador recommended that PM Maliki deliver a statement or speech on his security plan around the same time, but before the President's speech. The Ambassador said the PM speech should come at a time after the PM is certain that the security plan would make a decisive difference, and when the implementation of the plan has started or will start immediately after the statement. PM Maliki agreed both that he should deliver the speech and that he must be in a position to act quickly and decisively. The Ambassador said the plan or strategy should be to break the cycle of violence. Otherwise the situation in Iraq could continue to deteriorate, the government's standing decline further, and the enemies become emboldened.

RECONCILIATION, DE-BAATHIFICATION, AND THE MODERATE FRONT

13. (S) Complimenting the PM on his December 16 speech at the Political Parties Reconciliation Conference, the Ambassador asked the PM if he had begun to develop a plan for implementing policy steps raised in the speech. Maliki noted that the Ministry of Reconciliation was due to release that day a report of recommendations from the conference. Especially important would be those addressing the problems

of dismissed members of the former army. His office was looking to establish a commission to resolve the issue of the former army. The Ambassador noted that he had heard Iraq's new budget would include 100 million USD for paying pensions to former army members and 150 million for employment projects for those who were not of retirement age.

¶4. (S) The Ambassador related that he was speaking to Ahmed Chalabi about the process of de-Baathification. He also noted merit in a proposal by SCIRI leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim that de-Baathification should follow the along the lines the PM had proposed and also include a program for people who suffered under Saddam as well as a mechanism to monitor any resurgence of the Baath party. The PM emphasized it was important to develop a process of compensation for martyrs and political prisoners.

¶5. (S) The Ambassador said that KRG President Barzani was concerned that the IIP was hesitating on the moderate front. The Ambassador had seen their list of demands and asked the PM for his reading of the situation. Maliki described the IIP as being unreasonable in making the demands before the front was even formed. This reflected uncertainty within the IIP about the front and would open the door for other parties to come in with preconditions. The Ambassador stated that the IIP did, indeed, appear to be divided on the issue. They seek reassurance from the PM that their program will be taken seriously. Acknowledging the difficulties the PM and others faced in forming the moderate front, the Ambassador said it was important to move forward, ideally with Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish moderates together. The PM underscored his continued commitment to the establishment of the moderate front, which he said was essential for Iraq to be able to deal with its problems -- notably Moqtada al-Sadr on one side and fringe Baathists on the other.

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A MEETING WITH AL-DHARI?

¶6. (S) The Ambassador told PM Maliki that Arab League Envoy Lamani informed him Sunni extremist cleric Harith al-Dhari was interested in reaching some sort of cooperative understanding. Lamani had asked the Ambassador if he would be willing to meet with al-Dhari; the Ambassador did not wish to do so without consulting with Maliki first. The Ambassador said he did not know al-Dhari's agenda for such a meeting, or whether the latter would use it for propaganda purposes. The Ambassador said he was inclined not to meet with al-Dhari at the onset, but rather to send a lower level Embassy representative to meet with him to get a sense of what he seeks. Maliki replied that he would support any dialogue with al-Dhari that could produce positive results. It would be "a miracle," the PM stated, if al-Dhari truly sought reconciliation, but no avenues should be closed.

THE UAE AND THE PORT AT UM QASR

¶7. (S) The Ambassador noted that during his recent trip to the UAE, he had discussed Iraqi interest in rejuvenating the port at Um Qasr with UAE Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Hamden bin Zayed. Maliki said he wanted the UAE firm both to reconstruct and to run the port, or to build a new port. The Ambassador committed to convey this to Zayed. The Ambassador related that Zayed said that one of the problems with the port was that there remained a lot of damaged ships that needed to be removed, but Zayed said this could be done by a contractor specializing in ship removal. He had also mentioned concern about port security, noting militia activities nearby.
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